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Scarborough Reef—BS7H by Wayne Mills, N7NG

DX peditions never go exactly as planned and the trip to Scarborough Reef, scheduled for late April, 1997, was no exception.

The joint effort was led by Kan Mizoguchi, JA1BK, and Wang Xinmin, BA1OK, director of the Chinese Radio Sport Association (CRSA).

Plans were underway as early as the summer of 1996. Early plans outlined a trip departing from Hong Kong or even the Philippines as was done in 1994 and 1995. However, since the CRSA wished to participate in a major way, it was decided to seek a Chinese ship and sail from the PRC.

In due course, the ideal ship was located. A 1,000-ton, diesel powered vessel, operated by the State Oceanographic Administration of the PRC (SOA), had all the necessary hardware for handling boats, generators, and the rest of the gear needed for outings like this. This boat is known to us as "Number 74." For this trip, Number 74 was commanded by Mr. Li Lixin, Deputy Director of the SOA.



Ten of the eleven DXpeditioners during their abbreviated operation on Scarborough Reef.

Operating team

The Scarborough team was composed of eleven amateurs—six from China, three from the U.S., and two from Japan.

From China were Wang Xinmin, BA1OK; Chen Fang, BA4RC; Alan, BA1DU; Dragon, BD1RX; Jan, BD7JG; and Jan, BG7KW.

From Japan were co-leader, Kan, JA1BK, and Kazu, JA1RJU.

From the U.S. were Jim, W6EU (WA6AUE); Bob, W6RGG; and Wayne, N7NG.

Also aboard were two representatives from China Central Television (CCTV) who filmed much of the DX-

pedition and did interviews with the operators.

Special considerations

The group gathered in Guangzhou, southern China, on the 26th of April. The U.S. operators flew to Hong Kong and then traveled by train to Guangzhou.

As DXpedition locations go, Scarborough is a special case and special preparations are necessary to accommodate amateur DX operation.

First, and perhaps foremost, operating platforms must be designed since the rocks are not suitable for operating an amateur

radio station. Among the crew on the ship was a professional carpenter who would supervise the construction of platforms for the three rocks from which we would operate.

In addition, unlike other, larger areas, little room is available for antennas. While we knew we could easily erect the Cushcraft verticals—R-7000 and R-5—and a Butternut HF-2V for 80 and 160, we also intended to erect an A3S which Cushcraft generously supplied. We hoped to be able to place the A3 support near the platform and anchor the guys in the water.

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Other logistics were pretty routine. We planned to sleep and eat on *Number 74* and spend only our operating shifts on the rocks.

One important consideration was that of safety. On previous trips, the boat was able to enter the lagoon and anchor near the rocks. In our case, the ship was much too large to enter the lagoon. The largest rock which has been located is more than four kilometers west of the opening to the lagoon. The lagoon is very shallow in this area and it would be impossible to move between the boat and the rocks at night. If weather became a problem and evacuation was necessary, we could not escape to the ship. We planned to use rubber boats as havens of safety in case of bad weather at night. Fortunately, the weather was excellent and the swells coming over the shoal were virtually non-existent. We were surprised to find sufficient water over the shoal to navigate the landing boats, thus the ship was able to position itself only a short distance from our operating positions. Travel to and from the ship was then a relatively simple proposition, requiring only a few minutes. Staying on the rocks during the nighttime hours turned out to be no problem. This was very important, considering the times of best propagation, especially to the U.S. and Europe.

Arrival and set-up

On the day of our arrival, Kan, Mr. Wang, and I spent considerable time in the landing boats finding the opening to the lagoon and proceeding west toward the rocks. It was difficult to see the configuration of the shoal from the landing boat. We finally got visual help from the ship which guided us among the submerged rocks.

Once inside the lagoon, Mr. Wang, BA1OK, who had been to Scarborough Reef previously, was able to direct us to the operating area. One of us stayed on each rock as it was found. I stayed on rock #2, which was the rock upon which I would operate.

Soon, boats were returning with more people, supplies, and tools. The building

party completely covered the rock. The activity was furious and in less than an hour they were gone. In their place was a beautiful platform, complete with tables and chairs, ready for operating. The crew moved on to rock #1 and rock #3, in turn building platforms on these rocks.

"I was surprised to hear a jet aircraft fly over the ship. In fact, there were two aircraft.... This reconnaissance was a precursor of things to come."

Shifts, logging, and propagation

It was decided that Jim, W6EU, and I would take the first night shift, so Bob, W6RGG, took the equipment and set up a station on rock #2 for the opening QSOs early in the afternoon. Another group headed by Kazu, JA1RJU, gathered equipment and headed for rock #1. We listened anxiously to the radio on our ship, and soon Bob was cranking out CW QSOs on 20 meters. We began operating shortly after midday and by 6:00 p.m. it was time for a shift change.

The shift change would put Jim and I on rock #2 and two Chinese operators on rock #1 overnight. It was a beautiful night. During this time, we all checked-in with the ship on the hour to assure them that all was well. As morning came, we had nearly 2,000 more QSOs in the log, mostly with the USA. As the logs filled, Kan spent considerable time at the computer entering log data from the paper log. We logged on paper partly because of the difficulty seeing a computer screen in the bright sunlight and partly because of the inherently better accuracy realized with hand logging.

Conditions during the last two days on the Reef were phenomenal to the USA. We were able to work the States nearly around the clock. We were hopeful that these excellent conditions would continue. The first night was no disappointment. Much to the chagrin of everyone else, we opted to concentrate on the

Eastern U.S. and Central and South America. Conditions in 1995 were so bad that few, if any, stations in these areas were able to make contacts. Some of my friends in the West told me there was considerable frustration in having to wait while we were 20 dB over S9. At least we know we were doing what we had planned to do.

When morning came, however, we were in for a surprise.

Unexpected visitors

Late the first afternoon, I was surprised to hear a jet aircraft fly over the ship. In fact, there were two aircraft. They flew around for several minutes and then disappeared. This reconnaissance was a precursor of things to come.

Word from Japan to the Philippines indicated that something was happening at Scarborough Reef. This brought a Philippine Navy patrol boat to the Reef the next morning. The Filipinos informed us that we were in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Philippines. The Chinese stated that they believed they were occupying Chinese territory. That was the extent of the conversation between the parties.

We were not asked to leave. The Navy, however, stayed. Though a nuisance, they caused no great difficulty. Ultimately, for the safety of the guests on our ships, the Chinese decided to curtail our activity and leave Scarborough after three days.

BS7H summary

Overall, we were able to operate for 73.5 hours on Scarborough Reef. We completed just over 13,000 contacts. Over half of these were on 20 meter CW.

As usual, we planned to minimize the number of band modes in order to maximize the number of different callsigns in the log. Of course, we had planned on more than three days of operating.

We planned low band operation as well as RTTY for the last days. A tempt was made to get on RTTY during the last day but equipment problems ter-

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minated this operation before it got underway.

A new generation of DXers

An important part of the 1997 Scarborough Reef trip was the participation of the CRSA. Five young, enthusiastic Chinese DXers were invited by the CRSA to participate. They were very hard-working and anxious to try out their DXing skills. With a membership of over 6,000, the CRSA will lead the way for many potential BY DXers.

We made a number of new friends which is always a plus in amateur radio.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank Yaesu for providing the two FT-1000MPs, an FT-920, and an FL-7000 linear amplifier; Cushcraft for donating the antennas; and INDEXA for generous financial and moral support.

Others who helped include W9KNI; Earnut/Bencher; Tom Ewing, VR2GO, who helped us negotiate through Hong Kong; Brett Graham, VR2BG, who helped with logistics and communication; JA2JPA for help with generators; Mac, W6BSY; our families; and many others.

We also thank Mr. Li and the crew of *Number 74* who got us to and from Scarborough in a safe and efficient manner.

Staff Profile

Keith Retzer, W7KEU

As a teenager in the Chicago suburbs, Keith was interested in electronics and, like many other high school teens, he wanted a transistor radio. His dad decided a good project would be for Keith to buy a kit from Allied Radio and build his own radio. After wiring the radio and an FM tuner kit for the family, he built his first 2 meter transmitter from scratch from an article in *Ham Radio* magazine.

Around 1960, shortly after earning his voice license, KN9YNM, he upgraded to Technician, K9YNM, and with surplus Motorola FM trunk-mount gear, he went 2 meter mobile and remained only on

VHF until 1978.

Keith visited several amateur radio friends in Oregon and was impressed by their DX contacts and awards like DXCC, 5BWAS, and the USACA county hunters awards.



Keith Retzer, W7KEU

Quick upgrades, only a few months apart, took him to General and Advanced Class, and his current callsign, W7KEU. The technical part was a snap because for almost ten years he held a Commercial First Class License. The code took awhile.

Less than a year later, Keith was portable OA4 from Lima, Peru, and OA8 from the jungle center for Wycliffe Bible Translators. After a six-month wait for a Peruvian license, Keith became OA8AX.

From the jungles of Peru, on the other side of the pile-ups, he took the second place, single op, all band award for Peru in the CQ WPX Contest, followed by first place for single op, all band in the 1980 CQ World-Wide DX Contest.

Returning to the USA, Keith finished up 5BWAS in 1981 and worked all U.S. counties for the USACA award from CQ magazine. On June 6, 1989, Keith became the 620th amateur to work all U.S. counties. He continued county hunting and by September 21, 1993, he had worked all the counties a second time.

From his stateside QTH, Keith has confirmed just over 280 DXCC countries and his hunt continues.

Keith's second hobby, stamp collecting, coupled with QSLing, makes the hunt for DX especially rewarding.

INDEXA director honored for DX achievements

Ron Wright, ZL1AMO, was recently selected to receive a "Lifetime Achievement Award." The plaque inscription reads:

Lifetime Achievement
Presented To
Ron Wright, ZL1AMO,
For His Many Contributions
To The DX Community
Presented By
Southwest Ohio DX Association
Attaboy, Ron!

New Life Members.....

AH0W,	KJ7TH,	KK5UY,	K1MFZ,	WB7DPM,	JA1IRH,
K9AW,	N8MK,	K0KLK,	and,	KA9W	

Extra Help Provided By.....

W1HE0,	W1MGP,	DL4OCL,	K4YY,	K7NTW,	K1SRR,
KA3VIY,	W7LR,	KM4LS,	KD0JL,	KE5PO,	JA1IRH,
DJ9ZB,	W1WRN,	K7EWG,	W7DFW,	W6UA,	WA6WXD,
K4CTD,	W7HS,	K8CH,	G0WAZ,	KF5MY,	IK4AUY,
IK5XWA,	N3AE,	K0MVL,	W2TUJ,	S57AT,	WDX2TAU,
W5KFN,	and,	KA9W			

Staff Profile

Bill "Pick" Pickard, WA5PAE

"Pick" was first licensed in Knoxville, TN, in 1958.

In San Antonio, TX, 1966, he upgraded to General Class and changed his KN4 callsign to his current call WA5PAE.

From 1968-1973, Pick operated from Germany as DL4IZ and as AJ3ZK in USAF MARS.

The amateur radio "bug" bit hard in 1992 and on October 18, he returned to the air. In August, 1993, he was assigned the USAF MARS call, AFA1HK.

Pick upgraded to Advanced Class in March, 1993, and to Extra Class in September, 1993.

In addition to INDEXA, Pick is a member of the ARRL, the Southwest Ohio DX Association, and the Greater Cincinnati Amateur Radio Society. He subscribes to CQ magazine and *The 59(9) DX Report*.

Recently, he achieved the necessary copy for the 35 wpm ARRL Certificate of Code Proficiency and he hopes to earn the 40 wpm endorsement soon.

Pick makes use of packet radio DX information through node K4ZLE.

He needs a few more QSOs and QSLs to become eligible for the 5BWAS award and two more states will earn him the 160 meter WAS award.



Bill "Pick" Pickard, WA5PAE

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